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Senator's filibuster

The Limits of Power, by Senator Eugene J. McCarthy. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston. \$5.95.

By Saville R. Davis

The most courteous thing that a professional critic could say to Senator Eugene McCarthy at this point is that both suffer from limits to their power. A critic hunts through a book trying to find things to disagree with. A senator is apt to express himself in a hurry—even the liberal Senator from Minnesota who was once a college professor. So a confrontation is likely to be less than a constructive happening.

Mr. McCarthy has certainly shown, in his swift review of the world, that his heart is where a liberal's heart ought to be on many issues. He mistrusts the spreading of United States armaments around the world, by profitable grant or sale, so that countries stage an arms race and then fight with

guns made in America. He thinks the CIA ought to be subject to the checking and balancing control of Congress. He sees no fatal collision between the United States and China. He finds time to write about Micronesia, where the United States is forgetting its Trust under the United Nations charter.

But why he wrote this book is hard to deduce from its pages. If it was to instruct his constituents, then he does not place a very high value on their acuity. If it was to make up his mind on the spectrum of problems in foreign policy, this useful public servant could do much better. If it was to give his staff an exercise in compiling material — there is no evidence of this — he could be a more effective taskmaster. He surely didn't put the time and effort of which he is capable into a book designed, if such was his intention, to have some influence in the conflicts of policymaking with which a member of

the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has to deal.

The problem presented by the book is that of being too swift for careful thought. In five pages on the Middle East, to take an example, Mr. McCarthy goes down the line for Israel without bothering to consider what should be done with the Arab world. It's not the opinion, it's the absence of knowing how he would answer the questions raised by the other side, that is conspicuous.

From a distinguished public servant who is not naïve, these sweeps of judgment leave one reader at least feeling that he has not got hold of anything of substance. Facts are spotty and not meticulously compiled; there are many generalities and some question as to what several chapters were trying to say; as for the reasoning, it is unilateral, as if he had no adversary. Perhaps the Senator was throwing together a speech.